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UNCLAS COLOMBO 000396

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA (BOUCHER), SCA/INS AND PRM
STATE ALSO PASS USAID
AID/W FOR ANE/SCA, DCHA/FFP (DWORKEN, KSHEIN)
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA (MORRISP, ACONVERY, RTHAYER, RKERR)
ATHENS FOR PCARTER
BANGKOK FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA (WBERGER)
KATHMANDU FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA AND POL (SBERRY)
GENEVA FOR RMA (NKYLOH, NHILGERT, MPITOTTI)
USUN NEW YORK FOR ECOSOC (D MERCADO)
SECDEF FOR OSD - POLICY
PACOM ALSO FOR J-5

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: Northern Sri Lanka SitRep 47

Ref: A) Colombo 393 B) Colombo 384 C) Colombo 374 D) Colombo 368
E) Colombo 361 F) Colombo 360 G) Colombo 357 H) Colombo 351 I)
Colombo 342 J) Colombo 329 K) Colombo 321

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Army Commander Fonseka reported to Ambassador that the LTTE controls only 3 square kilometers outside the safe zone. Fonseka also estimated that the LTTE only had 600-700 hard core cadres and 300 Sea Tigers left. Defense Secretary Rajapaksa told Reuters that the military was in "no hurry" to reach the safe zone. OCHA reports 58,378 arrivals to government territory in the first three months of 2009. End Summary.

Fonseka: LTTE Controls 3 sq km Outside Safe Zone

2. (SBU) Army Commander Sarath Fonseka reported to Ambassador on April 6 that an LTTE doctor, captured along with 50 other LTE members after the battle for PTK, East identified the bodies of LTTE leaders killed during the 31 Mar-05 Apr battle. (Note: On April 5 the government announced the military had killed LTTE leader Prabhakaran's head security officer Gaddafi, the head of the LTTE's female fighters, Vidusha, and commanders Theepan and Nagesh.) Fonseka estimated the LTTE controls approximately 3 sq km outside the safe area, mostly open terrain west of the lagoon and southwest of the villages of Ampalavanpokkanai and Valayanmadam. Fonseka estimated it would take no more than two weeks to clear the area outside the civilian safe zone, after which the army will exercise patience.

Fonseka: 600-700 Cadres Left

3. (SBU) Fonseka estimated the number of hardcore LTTE cadres at

600-700 plus 300 Sea Tigers. (Note: Military and government officials have consistently underestimated the LTTE's strength.) Fonseka estimated there were about another 800 forced recruits with two weeks' training or less. He said 30-40 boats per month have been taking people from LTTE-controlled areas to southern India. He believes Prabhakaran, Intelligence Chief Pottu Amman, Sea Tiger leader Soosai and other surviving senior LTTE leaders are still within the safe zone. He said the rest of the senior LTTE leadership has been killed or wounded. The LTTE continues to improve its fighting positions within the safe zone, building an extensive array of earthen berms, ditches, bunkers, and minefields, Fonseka stated. He said the latest LTTE appeal to the civilians is to help the LTTE until the upcoming Indian elections, when a new, possibly more sympathetic Government might emerge.

Defense Secretary: No Rush to Safe Zone

14. (U) Echoing private assurances to Ambassador in February, Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa told Reuters news agency that Sri Lankan troops were "in no hurry to proceed to the no-fire zone." Rajapaksa explained that the military would not be in a hurry, especially when intelligence reports show dissension against the LTTE brewing in the area. "Time is not a factor here. Our major concern is to get these civilians out of the LTTE-controlled area. Very soon, you will see a lot of civilians coming out and making the

task of the military easier," the Defense Secretary said. On April 6, President Mahinda Rajapaksa called on LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran to surrender immediately or "face total annihilation within days if not hours."

UN Secretary General's Statement

15. (U) On April 3 U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon issued a statement expressing his deep distress over the plight of civilians in northern Sri Lanka. UNSYG's message stated that the LTTE was violating international law by forcibly preventing civilians from leaving the conflict zone. UNSYG also "deplored the forced recruitment of children" by the LTTE. At the same time the statement reminded the GSL to avoid the use of heavy weapons in areas where there are civilians and receive and treat IDPs according to international law.

Kaelin Seeks Specific Benchmarks

16. (SBU) The UN Special Rapporteur for the Human Rights of Displaced Persons, Walter Kaelin, told a group of Ambassadors on April 6 that his visit was part of a UN strategy to keep up a stream of visits and phone calls to maintain quiet pressure on the GSL to improve conditions for IDPs. After a visit to the IDP camps in Vavuniya, Kaelin said there are clear challenges but conditions are slowly improving. The major substantive outcome is that the GSL agreed that UNHCR will prepare a paper for GSL consideration setting out specific benchmarks for the GSL to meet on issues such as freedom of movement, return/resettlement of IDPs to their homes, and screening procedures in order to help build the confidence of the IDPs themselves, the donors and the wider Tamil community. Kaelin will issue a public statement on his visit on April 7. (Septel will provide more details.)

Latest Arrival Numbers

17. (U) The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that 58,378 persons crossed from the conflict area during the first three months of 2009. (Note: The figures are slightly higher than UNHCR's report of 57,412 new arrivals to GSL territory since November 2008. Ref C). The government in turn claims 62,106 arrivals between October 2008 and the beginning of April 2009.

Food Aid Delivery Complete

18. (U) WFP completed delivery of food aid to the safe zone (Ref B)

and the cargo ship "Dublin" would return to Trincomalee today (April 6). WFP will discuss with the government the next shipment of relief food to the conflict area this week.

Civilian Casualties and IDP Outflow

19. (SBU) Tamil sources from within the LTTE-controlled area report

149 civilians were killed, including 30 children on April 5, and 225 injured from April 3-5. Pro-LTTE website TamilNet reported 71 civilians killed and 143 wounded in fighting on April 4 and 5. (Note: Such reports from Tamil sources cannot be confirmed and are frequently exaggerated.) The Defense Ministry reported 2127 civilians had reached government territory on April 5.

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